

THE ARTS TRIBUNE



HARVEST AND
RENEWAL

FALL / WINTER
2024 & 2023

Reaping the Harvest

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Reaping the Harvest

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Prayer for A Severe Destiny

By Lupo Plaza

The house writes our obituary with sharp letters and gray vicarious sighs

The bedside candle still burns that voracious flame

Slowly igniting, cries for the both of us

A wall clock consoles the corners

Singing the agonizing truth

That our time has gone

Where did it go?

I don't know

Yes

I recall

It went to the void

To that fierce volcano

Where our memories lie still

Accompanying everything we lived before

Oh! Impetuous river that carries pulverized bones

Drag me, if you can, this lonely soul of piety and remorse

Let your current flood the veins of my quiet solitude, my perpetual soul

And conclude your crusade without disruption, letting nobody wind your heart again

An Apple in Repose

By Aiden Friesen

I hit the ground days ago
fallen from a branch that has long forgotten how hard I worked to climb it
I have not moved since

If only I held onto my branch

I was to be picked by a loving hand
In morning light, with dew on the skin and frost on the breath
I was to nourish the world

But I couldn't hold on

In earth I now lay
I see the hand pluck those with strength greater than mine
Was I too weak?

I feel rot begin to fester

Around me it wraps itself
Into my flesh it bares its teeth with such patient hunger

It penetrates deep

The rot will take me

My purpose never realized

Weaker I grow every moment that it bleeds me

I am encompassed

Not strong enough to fight

As I fester

I wonder if it's any different than if it were the hand that found me first

Warm hand or cold rot

I am eaten just the same

It was always my purpose

Born to nourish the earth, to help life larger than me grow and prosper

I am realized

Hand or rot

Man or earth

I give life

all the same

Lukewarm

By Aiden Friesen

Tea left out too long

Always feels colder than expected

Compare it a cold drink turned lukewarm;

The same temperature

in theory

But that couldn't be true

Whenever the tea drips down my throat

I can't help but shiver

As if the memory of its heat

turns it into ice on the tongue

my memories do just the same

Innocent

By Mary Lauren Wedlake

I dreamt that I had spent an entire day in the sun.
And my skin didn't burn, turn red and dry out.
And your heart was still beating, not six feet beneath me.
That the dirt under my nails came out swiftly.
I wasn't the one who was filthy.
Even in my dreams,
I am the innocent.
You are the guilty.
So that's why I hurried to bury you down, deep underground.
No one could ever know what I had done.
But even in my dreams you're the one with me in the sun.

a goblin market stillborn seedling

(an "ode" to ENGL 2140)

by indiana m. a. humniski

a kernel-stone, a rosebud,

withering-wuthering seed.

shrunk as a snail,

thinned as a reed.

perennial promise of pushing,

fickle as flighted bird,

a forget-me-not forevermore,

a hope, left unheard.

melancholia (on the moors)

by indiana m. a. humniski

halfway open mouth
whether in smirk or scream
naturally layered segments
in cliffside face or cream

halfway to a soul
internal clock that chimes
after the initial sting
the summit of sublimes

halfway to my doorstep
paused on windowsill
etched, your history remains
carved, my heart is still

halfway to your grave
evermore wanting
halfway to eternal sleep
evermore haunting

Illyria

By Eden Quiring

A silver sliver hangs above the world
from the velvet black costume of midnight;
upon this crescent perches fair unfurled
Olivia, lady of sleepless rites.
No telescope can turn away from her
to see the truth in stars so plainly writ:
this tide is unrequited. All endure
the delicate pain of being moonlit;
all but I, the violet in her garden
of green and yellow, her patient mirror.
She granted me, with ardour, pardon
from man's disfavour, for I am dearer.
I appealed to her not through music's spell,
but grief's shadow, which half her moon knows well.

Strawberry Hills, BC

By Hanako Teranishi

Strawberry fields are never forever.
Their plants wither into themselves
as fast as the berries' sweetness
dies on your tongue.
Eventually, juice turns to spit in your mouth.

John Lennon sang of a memory.
A place of home – an anywhere home –
Physical place, manifested belonging
through imagination unattached to physical planes.
Nothing is real.

(my) Strawberry Hills was real.
There were strawberries –
there were chickens, raspberries, and rhubarb.
There was a farm, a home, a truck with
Three children sitting on top.
A family.
A physical place, a physical plane –
Yet, it withered.
Roots ripped, tossed like weeds, among dirty sugar beets.
Over the home they built a strip mall.
Bulldozed. Constructed. Capitalized.
Depleted, sucked, and wrung.

Droplets of memory evaporate on my tongue.

Nothing remains.

her(our) Flowers and Grave

By Hanako Teranishi

I.

Grungy basement bathroom mirrors, 3 rd wave coffee shop windows, your glossy fisheyes
I see her beneath my skin, I see her between my sinew, I see her along my bones,
I see her polluting my blood. Our eyes of dirt and shit look through me.
I give my breath to the sea, I drink hate's poison hoping she will die. Her gaze of godly
indifference pierces between my eyes. Blood adorns my crown.

II.

Raindrops obscure images in windows. Unfamiliar made, comfort.
Raindrops mix with our tears, seeping beneath
Our skin. Unraveling
Our sinew. Weathering
Our bones. Diluting
Our blood.
We melt into each other – we fall apart into and out of each other
A puddle of consciousness bonds broken and
reconnected over, and
over, and over again.

III.

One day,
In another place.
When I am far away. And
when she finds eternal sleep,
when she becomes grass and roots

I will still come to lay flowers on her grave.

In the very end,

We will grow a garden from our bones.

Fields of time

By Jane Onyemaenu

In the fields of time, we sow our seeds.
With hopes and dreams in sunlit ray
Each moment a seed in earth embraces
A step, deep in life's grassy race

Through seasons of joy, through storms of sorrow.

We plant tomorrow's seed.
With our hearts filled with love.
We plan nurturing with sweat on our brow.

Mid-Day comes with its toil.
Everyday I seek for my joy.
Beneath the sun, its judgement eye.
We reap the fields, beneath the white sky.

It begins to get dark.

Chirping crickets gradually coming to life.
Gallant seeds which wallowed in grass.
Like Eden Lake, our labours yielded fruits.

Indeed, fruits to our hands.
Which sprang from earth at morning call.
Our basket emanates, enough fruits for all.
At noon day our back shall break tales.

For in soils of passion,

Our lips shall give thanks.
For the dreams that have yet grown.

Wheat Fields

By Jack Judge

Beyond his easel and the stool where he sits
Lies an endless view of golden grain
And while the sight of sun-glazed crops fill his heart with bliss
It could not subdue the sorrow from his brain
Although his life was tortured, he chose to create
To see the world in all of it's glorious, glowing colours
And while he remains oblivious to his own fate
He finds solace in the love for his brother
Yet he thinks himself a failure of his form
A poor, sick man whom no one knows
And if his legacy shall be reborn
Who will be there to reap what he sows?
So he sits in the wheat fields, painting the scene
With all of his hopes laid bare
To inspire the world with his art is his dream
But it is a dream, alas, he is never made aware

Lilith's Duet

By Elke Hasselmann

It was dusk and the snow had been falling for several hours now in large chunks making the ground soft and slippery. Allison was walking into the old limestone church with wooden doors, and snow caught in puffs onto the fabric of her coat and the strands of her hair. She pulled open the wooden doors of the large building, a modern construction of a Catholic Church, set with a wooden cross of Jesus hanging above each set of doors. She glanced up at his nailed feet as she walked around through the heavy doors.

Stomping her feet of snow and shaking her shoulders, seeing chunks of white fall to a black, wet carpet below her feet, she saw someone walking towards her. A man, maybe 30-35. With black hair, a slender build, not so tall as to be intimidating but his presence wasn't Comforting.

He smiled at her as he walked by, "Hello," he nodded. "Snows getting pretty bad, hey?" Allison's heart jumped, not in any good way though.

Her face remained neutral, and she walked past the man to a the hallway without uttering as much as a hello.

Since a night of clear shots and one too many flattering words, when she wore a silk, thin strapped tank top and someone's hands around her lower back, she felt wary of men. The emotional torture she held the next day along with an impression of poisoning from the clear liquid amongst others, made Allison dislike any inch of her own skin and ashamed, sicker of any physical contact she had with the opposite sex. And she felt that men knew this torture she held within herself and enjoyed making it a point of ridicule. So, she decided to ignore anything they had to say, as she believed there couldn't possibly be a good and pure man left amongst her generation of emotionally stunted, porn addicted, hateful men who were taught nothing but that they were superior to women.

The whole situation made her feel more scared and vulnerable than anything else.

Without stopping, Allison walked down a dark hallway that curved off from the entrance. It was warm in the building, and no lights had been turned on for the evening practice. She was here to sing choir, something of a socialization she believed. With other women and men ...older though. She was the youngest by 30-40 years at least. She enjoyed their company though; she'd lost her grandparents at twelve and craved for the familiarity and comfort they provided.

But the church was silent, practice wasn't to start until 7:45pm and it was 6:27pm. She'd come early to pray. This was her escape to her thoughts of that night. She felt ashamed and dirty, she thought God could help with that feeling.

Allison enjoyed praying in the small alcove beside the white, marble altar, mostly a place for the priests. All red and surrounded by articulate metal gating and more limestone walls. It felt medieval and she enjoyed it.

As she was walking toward the altar, past the wooden pews and down the maroon carpet, she heard a sound. She stopped, confused, she was sure she'd be the only one in here. Was it that man from before? Following her? Her body felt rigid then. No, he was leaving, right?

After a moment of silence, she walked on down the carpet, warily. Looking around without turning her head. She heard it again and stopped cold.

What is that? She thought. It's so faint, it can't be... It was suddenly louder then. It sounded like metal being pressed ...no, no.

Like swords, or knives, being pressed against other kin to it. It almost sounded like someone, something talking.

Allison walked slowly as the metallic sound continued, as she got closer to the altar a breathy noise began alongside the sound. This frightened her for many reasons, but she felt somewhere inside her, in her chest and brain, a physical pull to seek out what this was. It was begging to be heard, a whispered and rigid sound, it was telling her to come forth, to hear it.

She followed the sound, and it continued without stopping as her stomach tied knots as if she was about to vomit. She was sure her whole body was cold to the touch, as if her own blood

pumped through her at a frozen temperature.

The sound led her to the alcove. The metallic sound and gasping sounds continued, but from where? It surrounded her, enclosed her in the sounds and then in a whisper from behind her, “Behind the door.” It spoke! And it made Allison jump and brush her hand over the back of her head, finding no one there.

The door it referred to was a wall, with real gold artifacts placed upon it. A velvet painting depicting the Last Supper covering half of the wall hung upon it.

“Behind the doo-oor,” It spoke again in front of Allison. She moved to the wall, and suddenly with a press of her hand it opened, and a gust of wind hit her face as she peered into a dark, black, and grey staircase. It wasn’t dusty, just dim, and wet with moisture, like a cave.

Without thinking, she stepped forth onto the stairs. She descended, a daze had taken over her, she wasn’t in control it seemed of her own body. Her legs moved on their own as she heard the door shut behind her. Allison was surrounded in pitch black now. Fear had gripped her and maybe adrenaline led her further down into the depths.

The descend lasted what felt like an hour, until she saw dim light. Golden light on the last step, as if a fire was lit. This made her panic.

“Hello?” Allison shouted down the stairs. No one responded for a moment until the metallic voice of knives and gasps sounded, louder than ever and pulled her down the steps into the light. That’s when she saw it.

On a wooden stage, stuck in one place. Leaking, with long black hair. It was red...no, it was covered in a wet, bright red ooze. Blood? She thought with a drop in her stomach. It stood rigid, with long black hair, no facial feature Allison could see. Just soaked in...she swallowed.

The noise was loud, like it knew she was there calling her to come forth. It was in Allison’s ear, around her, in her head and it made her want to cry and scream. She pushed her hands over her ears to block out the sound and close her glossy eyes.

It screamed at her, “OPEN THY EYES!” Allison did just that.

There is no other explanation for this being, this is the devil.

She wanted to throw up from the noise and presence of this...thing. But she kept walking, being pulled by a string so deeply imbedded in her chest she couldn't stop it.

The wooden stage it stood so still, was old and rotted. The thing was surrounded in dry and new blood drops, leaking continuously onto the ground and soaking into the old wood.

As Allison moved closer to it, the thing twitched, its head ticked harshly. Allison wanted to stop moving but her legs kept moving, moving closer to the thing, she felt herself attempt to pray for mercy from God but couldn't form words or thoughts correctly in the presence of this bloody demonic devil. In a moment, she was in front of the thing. It twitched its neck so fast Allison thought it would snap.

It reached for her then with its wet hand and she wanted to scream in fear, but with wide eyes she saw the bloody things mouth open wetly, “See-ee, what I-hh, see.”

And with that it pressed against her clothed abdomen with a cold hand, melting the fabric and Allison gasped at the contact.

Her vision blackened then suddenly every moment, throughout history, men and women, everyone, appeared to her. She saw it in her mind's eye, images flashed now of peaceful times long ago. She could tell. A harmony. Eden?

The bloody thing laughed somewhere in the vision, a metallic sound but deeply breathy.

Suddenly images of fire, blood rain, torture, darkness, and fear pooled down in her vision. All the horrors of human beings presented to her and then suddenly images of men. Men hurting, poisoning the soils of Earth. A vision of that night, a distorted one, but clearly Allison knew what was being shown to her. There were images of pain and sorrow and suffering at the hands of men towards women; powerful men laughing, writhing in pleasure from the agony of women. Then the suffering ended for women, a bloody being rose from the fire and black silhouettes of humans. Abusers writhed in pain all over the globe, in the vision she smelt it. She heard the

metallic voice calling out, "Blessed be."

It smiled and raised its head and arms, and suddenly Allison saw it was herself. Covered in blood, smiling down on the world.

Allison wished she could close her eyes but there was no ability to do so. But before she could beg for it to end, it did. Her vision reappeared and she shook from what stood before her.

The bloody thing. Smiling, no nose, eyes or ears, just sharp, yellowed teeth. Black hair coated in the blood it produced. "See?" it spoke. "Tah-ak me." Allison was shaking her head no, wide eyed.

"Take me," It twitched its neck, its metallic voice surrounded her mind and she shut her Eyes.

"No, no." Allison cried. Her mind cried for her to do as the thing asked.

"To do what needs to be done." Allison heard it smile as it spoke. Her vision blurred and darkened then, she faded into a bliss.

She awoke on a wooden pew, with a slight headache alone still. Frightened at her surroundings, realizing she was in the church. She checked the time.

It was 7:36pm. People were piling in. She grabbed her coat.

Allison walked out from the church then, into the white snow.

It was dark out now, the only light reflected from the snow and the large streetlights glowing orange.

Alison was trembling and gasping, her breath came out in large clouds in the air.

She followed the air and saw into the parking lot.

The man from before, stood by her car, smoking, and suddenly made eye contact with her

and smirked, moving toward her.

She stood in fear, eyes wide, shaking and pressing herself against the wooden doors, just below Christ bloody feet.

Suddenly, her face slacked, her breathing slowed, her hands stopped shaking, relaxing by her sides.

And under hooded eyes, her head twitched sharply to the side, and she moved through the Snow.

Any fear stopped and her footsteps bled red.

The Message

By Gurshiv Singh Dabb

No one ever wins a war. I have been hearing this all my life. But what we are doing here is a revolution—an attempt to free ourselves from being the lapdogs of the one oppressing us. We have been raped, killed, massacred by these bloody vagrants. Yes, vagrants who don't want to live peacefully within their territory, struggle their way through our borders and claim a piece of land that was never rightfully theirs.

This is not an attempt to overthrow a nation but rather an attempt to save ourselves, our children, and the future generations who want to breathe in the free air. Air without a trace of malice, destruction, and slavery. People are not treated like people anymore, rather just a piece of meat lying somewhere dirty, laid, and ready to be butchered whenever they feel like it. I am scared. Anything can happen at any given moment. Maybe everything will vanish within a split second. No one will be alive to see the dreams we've been all weaving during the past few years under oppression. No! This is terrible! If this thing happened, no one would ever dare to dream again. A dream of renewed hopes will be just a feared imagination. Our children will carry no flames of passion, desire, and rage for vengeance and a vision of a land of free men, a land of justice, where peace will serve every heart with serenity. I could not let this happen. I would NEVER let this happen!

The world has no idea of what has happened to us. It never can. Today's generation has only heard what's in history, but we are witnessing it, again. Living and working the life of a slave is our reality. Suffering is the second name of our so-called destiny. We are forced to labor within our lands. Our farmers work tirelessly for the crops they harvest, and what do they get in return, only a handful, or maybe even less? Our workers pay taxes to the government not our own. If any of these workers refuse or even give the slightest hint of protest, they are killed. How many ways of executing someone you can think of? Well, the thing is, you cannot! You have no idea. My people are being publicly hanged, electrocuted, mutilated alive, thrown into the fire pit,

get their heads chopped, forcefully ingested with filthy fluids, and have gone through some of the most horrendous things that you and I cannot comprehend. If they're lucky, they'll only be provided lethal injection.

There is no escape for anyone. Nothing can escape from the eyes of their enforcers.

Those army of demons are no less than Satan himself. They did every possible evil to us, from picking up men and slaughtering them for fun to beating up elders until they fainted, or worse, died. Some people went missing, and most of them were never located. Only the lucky ones were found lying cold. No one knew what happened to them. Rallies and gatherings turned into massacres. No one was allowed to meet no one without any valid reason. Religious gatherings were banned. My citizens were mocked, bullied, and beaten in the name of these religious predicaments. These enforcers barged into our houses and molested our women, not even sparing children and the old. At times, they would force every member of the household to witness how They—

Some things. They are better left unsaid.

Just think of the families affected by their hostility. Their eyes must have been red and dry, weeping their losses. But do you think my people had the time to cry about the one who left us behind in this mess? All of them had much bigger problems ahead. All of us have a much bigger problem ahead. The problem of survival. The life of a nomad is better. At least they can move from one place to another whenever the supplies are scarce. We cannot! People are forced to live like a refugee in our land. But even refugees live in a safer space. Nothing is safe in a forsaken land, and it's exactly where my brothers and I are covering our heads for shelter. Still, but still, people blame us for starting everything. What have we started if I were to ask them? A war? What kind of war? This is not a war! Self-defense is never considered a war! It's been years since we have been silent for all the injustice and torment inflicted upon us, and now that we are fighting back, the so-called educated stupid fools are blaming us for spreading terror. They accuse us of destroying their meaningless world peace. They call us terrorists. Let me ask them, are they the ones suffering?

No right! It is we who are cutting our heads to free this land from the invaders. We are forced to display our dead children, our fellow citizens in front of the world. This isn't an exhibition, yet if the people don't want to believe us, they don't have the right to call themselves humans! They're all a bunch of filthy dogs!

What peace are these people talking about? Are their citizens living peaceful lives? As far as I know, the crime rates in these countries are constantly rising. People are being robbed, killed, and deprived of their human rights as well. And here they are talking about human rights and world peace. Bloody HYPOCRITES! If this is the very definition of world peace, then no thanks. We are good on our own!

These people who speak of peace do not understand that true peace will come from battling oppression and emerging victorious. True peace comes from defeating evil. The road is full of conflicts and struggles, and going through all these is the only way. They don't understand that true peace comes from maintenance and not from being silent spectators of oppression and injustice, unlawfulness, and suffering ruthlessness. It is a process, not a result.

Well, why am I blaming these people? Isn't the government to be condemned for all this? They are the ones who support these oppressors for playing the victim card despite knowing who is guilty of all this bloody mess. Their supporting such atrocity and letting this happen means that they are also equally guilty of all these.

Day by day, we see death feasting among people, coming in unexpected ways. Different weapons of mass destruction are being used against us. The army is going full-on for us all. Our ears have gone numb by all the gunshots, blasts, sirens, and screams. People say that World War 2 inflicted the most damage. But for us, this is no less than the Second World War. The whole land has turned into a vast concentration camp, where you never know who will be the next victim of this mass genocide. Each bomb thrown at us is an atomic bomb, which can wipe out our whole generation.

You all haven't seen what it is in here. The media is just showing a glimpse of a much

bigger picture. You will see more dead bodies lying in the hospital than the actual patients trying to get treated, even though all of these patients are inflicted by the calamity we're facing.

Doctors are trying their best but are outnumbered by the cases they have been receiving. They are exhausted and are in pain to see all this. I have no option but to send as many people I see injured in the streets to the hospitals. Even I cannot help them here. But still, I do want to thank them for their service to our people. It's because of them there still is some hope for us to keep our fight against this atrocity going.

However, whenever I find myself in an instant of momentary solitude, I realize how hard it is for us to win this battle. The system we are opposing is much more powerful, much more abundant, and has much more manpower than us. It is hard to defeat them with diminishing passion. It is tough to keep the hope renewed and fresh each time I see an infant lying alone in the middle of his dead parent, clueless of what has happened, each time I see these bleeding children writing each other's names on their arms, just so that people can recognize where they came from ones they are no more in this world, and each time I see a mother crying for her dead Child.

It is even miserable to see how some of our citizens, just to save themselves, sided with the oppressors. I am not talking about the common people, but rather the ones who were supposed to protect the people, the police force of this land. They've been fed money by these tyrants. I cannot say anything about this thing. I cannot because speaking more about these people will make me a hypocrite.

I have made some mistakes, and this one I consider the worst of them all. In the name of personal and familial safety, I sold my soul to these autocrats. I turned my back on my fellow countrymen, just for the sake of my family's safety. I have been selfish, yes, but never was I greedy. I was never like those people who were mercilessly killing their fellow nationals for the capital they earned. But I still am guilty of accepting that money. From the very beginning of this, I knew I was wrong. I always did. But I never dared to step up and help my citizens.

I have the blood of innocents on my hand. The more I try to wash it away, the more

dreadfully it haunts me. I barely get time to lay my head on the ground, but whenever I do close my eyes, all I see is the countless dead bodies blaming me for their untimely deaths. I somehow find myself the cause of the unimaginable grief their families suffered, including my very own. I see my sweet daughter standing in the crowd, holding banners and flags, shouting, and marching towards me. That day still haunted me when my wife ran towards me, holding my lifeless child close to her heart. What was the point of all this, of killing innocent lives if I could not save my daughter from them? What was the point of turning my back on my people if my own family was not safe? That day I realized I was supporting the ones who could never be my own. I lost that day. I lost every day when I was working for them, slowly killing myself in the process, turning myself into a fiend I never was.

After that event, I left the job and everything related to that dirty business, but so little did I know about their plans. When I entered home, I saw my wife covered in blood. Her body was so distorted that I couldn't even count her pieces. I sought vengeance, but vengeance was never to be found. The more officers I killed, the more I wanted to kill. Killing one would not be enough! I wanted to end this oppression. The flame within me ignited. But I never imagined it would cost me my family, my everything.

I wanted to redeem myself. That is why I began helping my people. Became one of the revolutionaries this land needed for so long. Decided to kill every single person who dared to destroy my country with their vilest plans. Now here I am, fighting the biggest battle of my life. I don't know what will happen, but I never want to lose.

However, I fear for the worst. Each day, they try something new and crazy enough to make us question our existence. They never spared anything. Bombing hospitals, schools, and evacuation camps is now a daily thing. I have no clue how am I going to deal with this. Every day my companions are either captured or brutally killed. Despite all this, we are trying to fight back. We were able to successfully launch infiltrations and destroy their camps. We have looted money and food for our people. We have done and are still trying to do whatever we can to protect our countrymen.

We have never dared to destroy huge bases. With the manpower so small, we never can. To be honest, I sometimes feel that we are fighting a lost battle. Things are slowly going out of control. I have never told this to anyone, but I am terrified thinking about the times ahead. It's going to be darker. I know that everyone affected by this reign of terror knows, but no one has ever talked about it. I occasionally fear that everything will come to an end like I never wanted it to be, but I can't just accept defeat. No one of us will accept defeat. If the worst is about to happen, let it happen! I don't want to die a coward's death.

Brave are those who know how to keep their spirits high, especially in the toughest times, and I know to myself that all of us are brave. We are all fighting and will keep fighting until our very last breath. Let the world be a mere spectator. No one has ever cared about us, and no one ever will. At this point, I don't even care. However, there is one unacceptable thing. I don't want these hypocrites to think that we are the root of all this chaos. I don't want them to remember us as terrorists.

Again, this is not a war but a revolution. We desire peace, and we stand for peace.

However, if the path will lead us through this chaos, let it be. We want liberty, and we will achieve it at all costs.

I want this message to be delivered to every single one of you before I meet my end. I don't know for how long, but if I die, I want you all to remember me as a fighter who died for my nation, not a terrorist like them.

Mosquito's Eye

By MJR Schneider

The other half of my finger, if you must know, is at the bottom of Mosquito's Eye.

It's been down there twenty years. I've gotten over it by now. I've been getting by well enough with only nine and a half. It served its purpose while I had it attached to me.

Detached, it serves a higher one.

It already didn't appear all that pleasant a day for fishing when my brother and I hauled our old father up to the lake with the boat. The sky was overcast, the air dense, muggy. But Father insisted, as he always did.

"I only get one birthday a year," he told us. "And nothing stopped me coming out here the last seventy times. If my pa brought me out here in a thunderstorm when I was ten and we came back in one piece you two'll damn well survive this." Father was hardly in a position to judge, of course, having gone over the course of the past year almost totally blind.

"Fishing is all feeling anyway," he claimed, "Eyes are optional. A practiced hand like mine can do it all on reflex. Believe me."

I wasn't sure I did. My brother, Lee, never the shrewdest among us, was convinced there would be no problem.

"It's tradition, Jared," he said, already slightly buzzed on the beer cans he was bringing along. "You can't just call it off for no good reason."

I wasn't one for arguing. The mat of cream cloud curdled overhead.

We were gone up into the north where the pines get all scrawny and yellowy-green, up the trail worming between the crags and muskeg, up to the little pier fingering out from the shore of Mosquito's Eye Lake. Stagnant, caked in blue-green algae, the shores gunked green, the gunk stickled with fishbones and dragonfly wings.

Scarcely another relic of human civilization in sight, save the stripped skeletons of a few old cabins and a chapel.

“Doesn’t it take you back to the good old times, Jared, just looking at it?” Lee reminisced, backing the boat trailer with our old tub down the ramp into the water.

“Why don’t you look where you’re going,” I shouted at him.

Mosquito’s Eye received her name from her near perfect circularity, like an eye, as well as being mosquito-infested. Her depths teemed with fishes and legend, legends our father and the old fisherfolk with their red, peeling napes and few and tobacco-yellowed teeth would never fail to regale us with as children.

“Once a little star came loose from the mouth of the Great Bear and it plummeted out of the sky and shot a hole right through the earth into hell and then that hole filled up with water and the water filled with fish,” Father would tell us by campfire-light. And in the night something (whether it originally came up from below or down from above changed with each telling) would come up out of the water, huge and hungry, and swallow people up who were on or near the water (an admirable enough myth for the purpose of terrorising children out of drowning themselves). To appease it one simply had to give back the heads and guts of the fish one caught to the waters from which they were fished, just as a little show of respect.

Father always had us carry the bags of fish-guts back to the water’s edge and dump them in, a custom we carried on even into adulthood, out of a winking respect rather than any genuine belief.

I hadn’t bothered to do it the previous time around and Father, with his failing eyesight, hadn’t noticed. It was all getting a bit tiresome for me by that point, in my thirty-third year; with the mounting pressures of real life pressing on my cranium from all directions, it was a chore to make much space in there for such frivolousness as fishing trips in the rain with blind fathers.

“You don’t just stop doing something because it stops making sense for a time.” he

told me, "You make sense of it and you keep on going." Lee nodded as if this was a sage adage. I had long learned to take the morsels of seeming wisdom Father's mouth dispensed with a healthy helping of salt.

We skipped out across the water into the middle of the lake, where Father insisted the biggest pike lurked. We hooked the fidgeting blue crayfish between the chinks in their shells and cast them out in wide arcs over the water surface, watched them sink beyond sight into the deep.

Air grew foggy with midges. Lee swatted them futilely away in his drunkenness. Father simply sat there on his stool, letting them collect on his bare, wrinkly, adipose back tattooed with a cross. I spritzed some bugspray on myself, watched the clouds grizzle Overhead.

"It's going to rain." I told them.

"So what?" slurred Lee, "What's a little rain gonna do to us?"

"It's not going to be a little rain," I said, looking at it darken and the birds flee.

"Then take out an umbrella, Jared," said Father, unhelpfully. Lee laughed and crumpled another can and chucked it into the lake, where it floated amid the algae. The thunderclouds laughed along too.

The rain began spitting gently and warm from the west like saliva from a drooling god. Father, with what was for him an immense effort, hauled up a fat walleye into the boat and felt it up and chortled as it thrashed.

"He's a big one," he said. "Must be near four feet long."

"I'm sure it is," I said. I flopped the three-foot creature into the icebox where my little whitefish was twitching.

Now it had really begun pouring, but Father and Lee were too thoroughly soaked in alcohol to pay it any mind.

"We should probably head back now," I said. "It's getting dangerous."

"But it was just getting good!" said Lee, barely holding onto his rod anymore. "Don't

be such a downer.”

Something caught his line and, before he could reel it in, yanked the rod from his hands. He fell back off his chair laughing uncontrollably, mouth filling with rain. I managed to grab the rod out of the water before it was pulled under.

“You idiot,” I yelled at him and kicked his side, but it only seemed to make him laugh harder. The tugging on the line nearly wrenched me overboard. I pulled back vigorously and tripped backwards over my inebriated brother.

“Don’t rock the boat too much, you two,” Father chastised, blank eyes full of rain.

I began reeling in but now it seemed less that whatever I was pulling in was actively pulling back than that it was just a heavy object, like I was dragging up a stone from the bottom of the lake. But the lake was too deep for that.

I stopped reeling; the line continued to slacken. Whatever it was was coming up on its own.

A few seconds and a whitish lump surfaced. My heart coldened to see it. The lump grew into the crown of a head and the breadth of it grew from the water thrice the length of the the boat and it arched out of the water on a thick, mucous, eelish neck and the face of it was all one wide grin of thin teeth from gill to feathery gill and two pinpricks of eyes above it. The fishing line threaded between the incisors. It raised a slender hand from the deep with fingers bent into a sign of benediction and spoke:

“Pax vobiscum”

My tongue clove to the roof of my mouth and was dumb before it.

It tilted its great head. “O, my poor, little Jared, do you not know me?”

I looked over at my brother, who seemed to have fallen unconscious. My father’s sightless eyes were staring directly at the being, his ears apparently unable to hear it. I shook my head.

“Do you not remember, little one, the wise admonitions given you of your father? Do

you not remember the covenant between the flesh of they whom these waters feed and the flesh through whom their flesh is fed?”

I shook my head again.

“I am old; something of an elder age of rain and soot. I am tutelary of this living water, the little finger of Leviathan. I was here before the children of this land bestowed upon me a name and learned the art of my propitiation and I blessed them with fish. I will remain long after they have forgotten it. I was here when they revered me as a spirit of life and decay, I was here when the priests came and consecrated the water I breathe holy and told me I was a devil to be exorcised and I was here when the geographers and the geologists came and deconsecrated it and told me I was myth. But before Abraham was, I am.”

My face was numbed enough that I barely felt the hail coming down upon me.

“I am merciful and longsuffering. I demand of every man, woman and child who enters my domain only the heads and the entrails back of what I offer up from my storehouses. I have whispered the knowledge of my will from generation unto generation, that their children and their children’s children may know that I am the lord of this cold water and the prince of this living water. I whispered it to your father’s father’s father’s father’s father and he carried my whisper down to your ear. And yet you, you have hardened your heart against me, have forgotten such chthonic virtues, have forsaken the fanes and left the altar bare. I am merciful and longsuffering. I will by no means let wickedness go unpunished. And what have you to say for yourself, wicked one?”

My tongue freed itself again and I spoke in a muted voice through the hail.

“How am I wicked? How was I supposed to know you were real? How was I supposed to know you weren’t just one of a million other legends out there? How is that Just?”

“Just?” said the being. “Little one, I am nothing if not just. I am justice. I demand no unreasonable sacrifice, and yet I am scorned. I demand no unreasonable belief, yet I am Disbelieved.”

“What do you mean?” I said. “Of course you’re unreasonable. What could I have possibly seen in the world before now that would have led me to reasonably expect a giant creature to be waiting to eat me in the middle of a lake?”

“You heard the word of your fathers, yet you ignored it. I could have appeared to you and you would have thought me a dream.”

I hooked a finger up at its smile. “You are a dream. You are a product of dark and malnourished minds, dreaming of something greater than themselves, piecing half-formless shadows together to make an order out of the wilderness. There’s no need for something like you in today’s world, where we have telephones and insulin and helicopters and weight loss pills and nuclear bombs. There’s no more need to keep bringing the pains of the past into the pains of the present. You deserve to be forgotten. You belong in the past.”

The being’s smile did not change but its voice grew serener.

“Perhaps this is so,” it said to my surprise. “What though I am a dream, nonetheless I am a dream that was dreamt and have carved myself into the living clay of every generation to come. Though you may seek to forget me, I cannot be forgotten. Though you may seek to escape me, you seek to escape what is even part and organ of your very self. And that is a folly that merits at least a slight, though infinite, chastisement.”

It bent its vast head down to my level so my quivering finger was just before its maw and closed its thin teeth softly around it.

“Pax vestra revertetur ad vos”

It sank back into the murk and vanished and the rain began to let up.

“Was that you talking about something just now, Jared?” my father asked.

“Maybe,” I said.

“What happened to your finger?” groaned Lee with half open eyes.

I looked though the air where the end of my index finger used to be, pointing at Nothing.

“I think a fish must have bitten it off.”

SUGAR CRASH SWEETHEART

(THERE ARE GOOD THINGS BEHIND MY FACE STILL)

By LJ Fulujan

I went on vacation last summer. The brief trip to the West Coast was the third of what has become an annual tradition for my group of friends. A reset, for me. The sort of outlet that “adults” are supposed to use to sort out the tragedy of living a life without ending it. Wow, that’s pretty edgy. Anyways.

Granville Island is a tourist trap located in British Columbia. Knowing the location doesn’t matter, to be honest. If you know what I’m talking about then you can fill the gaps in yourself, but the term *tourist trap* should be informative enough. I’d be wasting my breath with exposition. Not like you’d care. I had been apprehensive to go. I’d been there in each of the two years prior and the crowds of the public market never agreed with me. I joked we might see Ryan Reynolds (“The one in *Lalaland*?” one of my friends had asked. That was fair. Too many Ryans in Hollywood. The one in *Lalaland* (2016) is Gosling, so please don’t forget that). I’ll give. It would be my friends’ first time going there, so we could all shop for souvenirs. Somewhere cheap. Together.

My friends and I took two trains and a bus to get there. I walked alone for a little bit, past that dumb sign and straight for the pier. Not because I didn’t enjoy my friends’ company, or anything. It was probably just because I needed to be alone. I’ve been needing that more, lately.

Although it is referred to as such, Granville Island isn’t really an island. It is fully connected to the rest of the metropolitan Vancouver area. Still, it overlooks the sea. I sat on a rock to watch it for a

bit. We Midwesterners don't get to see large bodies of water enough. There are so many sights that we don't get to see, and didn't, and won't—

Name five things you can see.

Does the difference between the water and the sky count? A flock of seagulls shares this spot. I'll count the group as one thing (there were more than five). Tree. This rock.

That you can hear.

It's far enough from Granville's main foot travel to hear the lapse of wave (the silences in between). The many distant voices blur into a din, just like my vision unfocusing. Seagulls are crying out in chorus with the wind, and the plants rustle against it as well. Inhale. Breaking.

Across Granville, my friends are probably in a cafe having drinks and ice cream. They're enjoying themselves, being tourists, like we were all supposed to when we took two trains and a bus to get here. I should be looking at postcards or some shit, not this mindfulness bullshit. All I've got is a pack of gummy worms.

Feel?

My hands, covering my face. Strike that. Nothing at all.

The breeze is nice. Amongst the sailboats and SeaBus, someone is paddleboarding in the bay far enough from the shore that the perspective sort of makes them look like a strangely-proportioned toddler. Sunglasses are hiding their eyes. It must be nice, something whispers to me, to be in solitude rather than alone. A whole world to yourself. Their oar cuts through the water and stops. They're looking here now. One arm rises into the air and waves.

Reciprocate. It's just a person. One someone else who has broken out from the sea of someone-elses. Nondescript as the back of your own hand. Unless yours is descript, I guess.

They're the spitting image of something. Of what, I don't know. Maybe they were the metal fence of a schoolyard after years of rust and ivy have covered it, still recognizable by virtue of location and function yet completely ignored. All worn out by just being. Saying hello is always nice, though, and I noticed.

They are smiling, but it's fading, and their greeting arm is down before the corners of their mouth. Our eyes hesitate to return to the distinction between sea and sky. A one-sided game of chicken. The boundary of a horizon. Seagulls depart.

I sit there for a while, just like that. The prinpick feeling of a stranger nearby eases away as the splash of their paddle is swallowed by the wind and seagulls. What were we looking at? There, where those two blues once met? I'm looking and still can't see.

The other is already gone by the time I bring my gaze back to the bay. It's just me and the breeze, again and again. What a waste. Now I have to start the whole exercise from the beginning. How did it go again? *Name five things you can see?* I've probably mentioned the water. Does mindfulness work if you don't have it anymore? The pack of gummy worms is already out of my bag. It probably doesn't.

[break]

Looking right now, you could see all of it. The water, the rocks, the bridge overhead— there are so many sights, so many that we didn't get to see, and more I won't remember.

Now it's all cold oil. All opaque and clumping. Sticking to teeth and the insides and outsides of my gums. I want to say words. Be melodramatic and waxing and try to make this world look like not-the-way-it-actually-is. Swallowing is not enough to dislodge the mass growing at the back of my

throat. I'll do anything to get the words out. A mint to get the flavour off. Let this be the last time I vomit near you.

The lining of my stomach can be painted in pretty colours and spoken about so lovingly. It's painful, it hurts, but I can never want it to end. The idea that it would end and that you would leave before me makes me sick. Sick. So sick. All aches now. The sugar crash heartbreak I knew that would remain in your space is another question that will rot with the life of everything else. Breaking.

I won't see this place again. Five things won't be enough to remember.

My eyes regret the memories they made. I should have worn my glasses more when I was with you[1], but we were always at home, and I don't wear my glasses while I'm comfortable. I'm sorry things turned out the way they did. That when we think of each other, it will be blue tones and uncomfot. It'll be how my shaking hands drop everything but want to hold fast and how your stomach doesn't let you sleep at night. The last time we ever saw each others' faces will fade and decay, but don't worry, dear. Candy never expires.

There are good things behind my face still. I remember so clearly the way we held hands. We let go so quickly, but God, it was always so warm. Clammy? Yes. It was okay. It was your hand. *Can we stay like this for a little bit?* and how you looked out the window after every time we smoked becomes drenched in permanent red dye 40. *Remember?* you whispered, the curve of your spine, and *I will*. The sweetest thing left.

I've buried in sugar and let boil a pig's heart. This candied apple will never, ever spoil.

[break]

I just wave. The paddleboarder is gone, yes, completely. They've left no trace of themselves in the water. It was rude, then. To give those emotions to some stranger. It's still nice, though. Goodbyes can be the same as hellos.

My phone goes off, and the notification tells me to get my ass to the toy store. I join Granville's din. The blue becomes orange before it is blue again.

Later that evening I am sitting applesauce on a sofa bed in a basement suite rental, basking in the glow of no less-than-three lamps. See, this is one of the hidden luxuries of staying somewhere other than your own home; the energy bill is not yours. My friends have gone out for a late night walk to 7-Eleven for snacks. *Want to come with? / No, no, I've got a shitload of work, so I'm gonna work through it before we leave.* Classic. It's summer—there's nothing to do. But you can want to be alone. Even for a little. That's another thing about staying somewhere other than your own home, though it's less luxurious. You don't get to be alone very often. Hey, the sofa bed is comfy. That's a win.

[break]

Sorry, did you say something? Oh, okay. Anyways, it'll be nice to be home again. We've been riding the metro all week. Very commuter friendly. Unfortunately, the capitalist idea of property is too engrained into my brain. My car's at home. A drive would do me well. Driving is enjoyable to me for its stereotypical reasons; loud music and actually experiencing what life has felt like. A hundred miles an hour. Rapidly heading towards a brick wall. Haha. That was a joke.

The main thing about driving is that you're allowed to be alone. It's safer to be. There will be some passengers who ride along, and they might even find the Swedish fish in the glove compartment. Everyone gets off, however it looks like. That's probably why I consider it to be lonely. But I can also dream of nights that don't end on my way home. I'll be back in time for it to be early morning (not

night; I had gone through that already). Why does the industrial district look like that in my mind? Why does it curve into a darkness that I can't make out? Am I always alone in the car, even here? Why does the sky look like that? It is pink and mottled green and flat like stale dollar store lollipops, and I wish it looked like this more often. More beautiful than any organic.

The car goes back and forth so many times with no idea as to why. I'll waste so much time and gasoline until the end, The End, when the car is parked. When I've thought it dead, and the first word that comes out is something other than *I'm sorry*.

Right now, I'm just thinking of the ocean. The road by it. Me. The rocks dashing underneath. We sat here, once. One day, I'll go again.

[break]

It's a conceited thought, to say the least. Masturbatory if I can say more. Two lamps are off by the time that opinion is formed and, when the last one casts darkness, I lay down on the sofa bed. I'm breathing. I'm eating gummy worms. I'm breathing, again and again. Too much to notice when. When I sleep, it'll slow. I'm not even sure if I breathe when I'm asleep— just kidding. I'm a snorer. I'll breathe, even if a rasp escapes me or the smoke is exhaust. Air's movement into my lungs is the same as those we made at Granville.

I don't want this. I just want to leave. Behind-the-wheel becomes the same everywhere when enough asphalt is placed on top of the road. Somewhere else, my dream's a star setting on an ocean, and yummy orange twilight is burning a driver's side window alive.

Five things I can hear. Only one matters. The waves on the rocks. The waves on the rocks again. An engine is beginning to groan; waves on rocks, forever.

This lullaby is enough, and I'm asleep by four in the morning. My friends are back when I wake up. There's a Tim's across the street, so it's coffee for breakfast. No, it's not a coffee. It's a French vanilla. Fuck you. Sorry—I'm speaking to my stomach, there. There's a point where you mix and store that liquid (or any liquid) for long enough that it evolves past dairy. It's a delicious laxative. But goddamn: I love to shit.

Today, my friends and I will take it a little slower. Lazing and napping are crucial parts of a vacation, to me, and the sofa bed made it much easier to do both. Time is moving recklessly forwards, faster than a tenth over the limit. Is it catching up? The rental is smoke-friendly. Cruelly, this is pressed harder into my brain than most of the others I'll make during that trip. Still, it's nice. Peaceful. A snapshot of my recent memory immediately before my enamel erodes. Even the blue there was different. Blue, blue, blue. Bluer than Warheads and Livewires.

Why can't I be didactic, for one fucking second? Say what I want to without having to re-imagine vacations or chew candy? I've seen both sides to this, and they're the same. Bitter, sweet. My tongue will sample every taste on that disgusting range until it finds the one that fills my cavities. It's the only form of mindfulness I learned when I was supposed to: to go and keep going, keep going, long after it's expired. It would be a waste to throw away.

We do nothing that day. The gummy worms are all gone.

A Returning

By Alex Rana

Vail II.

The long, dry days of summer have never stopped you from going out, from exploring all that the world contained in that microcosm of a few thousand homes. The heat was merciless, bronzing your skin and making the dark strands of your hair burn at the touch. Tiny rocks that replace the lawns cut at the bottom of your feet until you could run across them without feeling any pain.

Pavement pounds under the soles of your new runners as you chase the basketball down the street, following it into a wash where you hesitate briefly, your mom's warning ringing in your ears. Monsoon season was far enough away, you reason, ducking under the orange poles and half running, half sliding down the concrete basin. You scoop the ball up with both arms, holding it tightly to your chest as you run back to where your friends wait at the curve of their driveway, thankful not to have become another news story of a kid washed away in a flash flood.

Burlington.

You wanted to die a few weeks ago. The scratchy feeling of your grandma's quilt became comforting as you pulled it over your head, trying to sleep, trying not to think of returning to the States and immediately starting a new life, a new school, again. Your adolescence swept these thoughts up in a whirlwind that spat out the only logical conclusion: death.

Despite your best efforts, which involved praying every night for the rest of your stay in Winnipeg to not wake up in the morning, here you are, standing in the hallway of your high school in a crisply ironed Polo shirt, regulation navy, sifting through your options. Lunch was about to begin, and you had yet to decide what persona to present to the kids here, how to infiltrate the tight-knit group who had all been together since preschool.

All morning, you stuck to observing, cracking jokes with the ones who leaned over to talk to you as you gathered up our books. Now, you face the hardest challenge of the day: figuring out what to say for 30 minutes of unregulated conversation to win over enough people to ensure the next four years were not completely miserable.

Erkrath.

As August bleeds to September, and the days condense further with October's approach, your culture shock fades into familiarity and a bit of mundanity. Although the lack of pumpkins and Halloween costumes is disappointing, you find yourself staring at the cobblestone streets you wind across, shoving at the piles of withered leaves with the toe of your boot.

Being here reignites some feeling in you, so long-buried you had forgotten it entirely. For the first time in years, you feel that you belong somewhere. Carrying your bags back from the grocery store became an adventure. Watching *Hill House* on the small TV, his back pressed against your chest, both of you under the fuzzy throw, fills you with a sense of contentment you would have once scorned.

Vail II.

The twins that lived across the street had just moved away. You had a dream about it the day before they told you, which did not help stifle your growing belief that you have a knack for sensing the supernatural, for parsing out the bits of *other* that manage to slip through the veil protecting some hidden realm.

Their dad had died the fall before, an event that your ten-year-old mind could not comprehend. The first thing you asked one of them when they rang your doorbell the day it happened was if she was joking.

His memorial was an awkward, somber affair held in one of the multi-purpose rooms of the local high school. The last time you were there was for a Christmas movie day, eating nachos while your librarian tried to figure out how to connect the projector to the DVD player.

As your memory intersperses images of kids seated on blankets with the lines of chairs filled with people dressed in black, you glance at your parents. Try to focus on the words that the people at the podium were saying and not on the way my mom's face turned away from you, her pinched-mouth scowl when your little brother tried to hop off his seat. Your drive home was silent, punctuated in sharp bursts with her comments on what the family had been wearing. The fact that their mom allowed one of the twins to wear jeans was an atrocity of the highest regard.

The sun set late out here no matter the time of year, and when you get to your house you ask your dad for permission to go for a walk down to the park that had just been built. He has immediately become engrossed within his laptop, nonresponsive so you have to repeat the question

twice. As your mom marches upstairs to put your brother to bed, she calls out a “no” to the question you mistakenly assumed she was already out of earshot for.

You sulk upstairs a few minutes later, passing by the open door of your brother’s bedroom where you hear her reading to him. Push down the slight sourness that rises up. It wasn’t that long ago, the last time you believed she loved you too.

You walk into your room and pull *The Golden Compass* off the nightstand, drawn into a world that parallels your longing. Your future spins itself out on a thread.

Burlington.

Getting your senior photos done in our backyard seemed like a good idea, mainly because you couldn’t be bothered to pick another location. You’ve seen the previous graduating classes in the yearbook, girls posed dramatically against the backdrop of a downtown alley, guys leaning against the track fence, trying to appear nonchalant.

Your back presses uncomfortably against the gnarled tree in your yard, as you shift to obey the photographer’s directions with wooden movements. A single yellow swing, aged and sun-bleached, hung at the edge of where the property line meets the woods. The first time you saw it, an emptiness blossomed inside of you, reminiscing about a childhood you feel yourself rapidly ageing out of.

Force a smile on command. Soon you’ll be out of here, out of this home, this school, this town.

Erkrath.

Your cousin calls one night in November to tell you that your grandma just passed away. She was wrong. Your grandma is, in fact, still alive, or at least clinging to the last bit of it left in her nearly 90-year-old body.

A couple days later, your dad calls. Your grandma is really dead this time, continents away. You snuck out of the house the morning in August you left for the airport, wanting to avoid her invasive questions. She saw you, calling your name as you pulled your suitcase through the front door. Maybe you should have said goodbye.

Your dad asks you to come home. You book a flight back for that weekend.

When the sun climbs into orange hues through the skylight window the next morning, you bury yourself deeper in the blankets and wrap an arm around the one person who you let yourself be held by. Press into the back of your eyelids the feeling of how your fingers fit together with his, the way his half-open eyes land on yours in the morning, a hundred amber flakes crystalizing.

You don't want to leave, but you feel relief at getting back.

Everywhere.

You lose more of yourself.

A Time For Renewal

Poetry

Pretty as a Cloud

Mary Lauren Wedlake

the gardener invokes her soul (inspired by Michael Field)

Indiana M. A. Humniski

Renewed Hope

Jane Onyemaenu

Counting the Remaining Petals on an Increasingly Shriveled Rose

MJR Schneider

House of Open Windows

MJR Schneider

swan lake (reflections on certainty)

Jessica Gibson

petals in my mouth

Jessica Gibson

Visual Media

His Pink Kiss

Ashley Henderson

Prose

a eulogy to winter

Mayah Duque

Spring Upon Us

Elke Hasselmann

Pretty as a Cloud

By Mary Lauren Wedlake

When the sky looked as though its clouds were painted so meticulously with a brush.

How the colours blended together so vibrantly.

You stare up at heaven's masterpiece.

That kind of obvious beauty that catches the eye.

Look out past the sky.

Then back down to the ground, dirt and grass.

See the smoke and where the fires burn brightly.

Look towards the horizon, where the sky meets the Earth.

Look here right at me, not at your feet.

You may not think it's as pretty as the clouds,

But at least it will stick around.

the gardener invokes her soul (inspired by Michael Field)
by indiana m. a. humniski

Till over the soil
Renew the land
Sweep off the soot
Of unworthy hand

Guard the seedling
Steadfast and bold
Water the stories
Of land, left untold

Take in the view
Open the shutters
As hummingbirds float
With little wing flutters

Greenery and gardens
All flatter and flounce
With growth and abundance,
Only currency that counts

When the leafings unfurl
When the seed-pods burst
When you are the only
When you were the first

Sing a new song
Spring, in C Major
Sung with a vigour
Soul, you aren't a stranger

Renewed Hope

By Jane Onyemaenu

A new season is here once more.

A moment to shed our leaves and rise to the sun.

A time of solace and immerse joy.

For to our eyes, the witness of spring yearly promise

Our lips now beckon for a new hope.

A break from winter slippery hearts

Yet to our palms, songs of victory

With hope of a new life

We wave aside as time switches.

The birds chirp, calling on the new break light.

The butterflies, bees, and all assemble.

For indeed, the smell of rain, green grass, and clear sky

The tress so green, the water so clear

The spring with divine blessings,

So come on, come all.

Some say its just a day.

Others just another season

But the mark on the floor speaks a story.

Of pain and anguish

Its to the yellow sun, that sets at dawn.

Sprinkling great peace that dwells in life.

Oh, it is a time to remember the promises made

To refresh, regrow and replenish.

To water those flowers so, they blossom yet at dark.

The renewal is here atlas.

For soon the sun will break

The new hope calls our name.

Counting the Remaining Petals on an Increasingly Shriveled Rose

By MJR Schneider

1. A Rose is a Sore in the Cosmic Skin we water to keep bleeding.
2. Vibrant as the Night behind the New Moon.
3. Exposed Patch of the Flesh of Time. Exposed Mechanics of Time's Lungs.
4. Mouth biting without Teeth or Bite bitten without Mouth?
5. A Rose is a Cross-Section of the breathing Throat of Eve.
6. Red as a Number 6 in the hot Rain. Red as Saturday in June.
7. Is too whylessly by now to bloom for even just the Sake of blooming.
8. A Rose is a Leak in the Seal of Death; God dribbles from the Puncture like a fine Pus.
9. God's closed Lips make up each Petal, God's closed Eyes, each Leaf.
10. Red and dark and fertile as the closed Womb of Death.
11. A Rose is made of Glass Shells full of Nothings, which the Poet, like a Thrush, cracks open.
12. The Mother/Daughter/Grandchild/Bride of her Father/Son/Self.
13. It means too many Meanings to mean anything but it.
14. A Rose is a Scab on the Cosmic Skin we pick to get a Peek into the Real.
15. Purple as the Joy of Flies. Violet as the Power of the Hornet.
16. Love is Roses.

17. Entropy is the Love Roses.

18. Nothing that forgot not to be and was but then remembered

19. A Rose is an Elegy in a Tongue no Tongue remembers how to speak, but still, to turn a
Petal to a Burn.

House of Open Windows

By MJR Schneider

Liars makes the slyest Architects, they've worked out how to build

Houses on Foundations made of Air

They hew the dusk-stretched Shadows of the Trees and Children into Beams

And fashion little Window Panes of Rectangles of Memory

Fish little Shatters of the Sky off the Skin of the River

And brick their Shards together into Walls

They tile the Rooves with Rabbit Holes, paint it in Papercut

And you can walk around in one and lay down on the Couch

And warm your cold Bodies by the Hearth of bottled Stars

And dwell therein contently so long as you don't mind

The Lack of Floor

Or the Presence of Weather

The Rain, you see, hasn't the

Patience for their Metaphysics

The Vulture knocks

At the Cloud Door

swan lake (reflections on certainty)

By Jessica Gibson

the swan whispers to me,

"sometimes i'm insecure

about how pale I am,

when you visit the pond,

your skin

has more colour."

i tell the swan,

"i think you are perfect."

a year later,

the swan presents me with a rock.

the rocks in the pond
are uncountable,
but the swan chose this rock
just for me.

i collect white feathers,
"i will accept anything you give me."

another year elapses,
the swan swims after me,
"you are so certain,
sometimes it scares me,
because I don't always feel certain
about you."

i release white feathers and rocks
with shaking hands

petals in my mouth

By Jessica Gibson

i haven't felt heartbreak like this
the silence i prescribed is maddening
peonies, lilacs, roses, sunflowers,
all beginning to wilt
how do the days keep passing
the flowers haven't been watered in weeks
i dreamt of you last night
spent the whole day arguing with you
forgiveness forgiveness forgiveness
who heals more, me or you?
our garden is dying
it's not a competition but i think you're winning
you still inspect the garden

cut off the dying flowers

i'm still noticing

i will grow a new garden

that you will never touch

His Pink Kiss

By Ashley Henderson

a eulogy to winter

By Mayah Duque

as fall's end approached, i warned my friends and family as i do every year - "please remember that i am not myself in winter."

then who are you?, they would ask, an eyebrow raised, maybe a playful tone if they hadn't known me for very long.

and maybe i'd laugh, or shoot a pitiful smile. sometimes i'd try to explain how the answer is nothing. in winter, i am nothing but a reminder of everything i was in the spring.
but winter is cruel, and i'm an easy target.

it encouraged the night to overstay its welcome. a lot of people lost their way, and i was no different. even while watching me stumble through the darkness, winter chose, with a certain sense of cynicism, to never allow the sun to shine. i gave up eventually, and my eyes adjusted. darkness wasn't too bad, as long as you didn't expect anything of it. was it spite? jealousy? whatever it was, winter was selfish, and i will not miss her.

a good thing i remember about her is the way her hands fit so perfectly in mine, and how our fingers interlocked like the weaving of wind in the air. how her hair was silver like the clouds that filled the sky.

her eyes were a deep black - the opposite of the snow on the ground. her embraces were anything but warm, but lasted longer than i could ever ask for. i think i started to like it. i don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing.

but in her presence, my life was not mine. she took away my hands, and i was no longer a writer. the harsh winds never brought me comfort, and i yearned for spring; when i would have a reason to do something again. to be something again.

now she's gone, just like i had wished. spring has come yet i am a me that has close to no difference. the sun's warmth envelops me and i only get colder, and my body seems to reject what my mind knows is good. i think i've begun to realize that winter is not the absence of sun, but spring is the absence of a desolate (comforting) cold. spring didn't bring me anything except guilt and grief.

it's ironic that the only thing that brings me back what winter takes from me is winter herself. she spent her last breaths with that familiar degrading smirk, as if her eyes weren't the ones threatening to close. i said to her, "please don't go. i am not myself in the spring."

then who are you?

"nothing without you."

i'll be back after the fall.

Spring Upon Us.

By Elke Hasselmann

The spring brings the smell of damp wood and the resurgence of childhood, my girlhood.

The forgotten ideals and imagination once held within my mind bloom again wildly like a tulip after the first rain, reaching for sunlight from deep within the soils it laid to sleep under heavy snow.

Under bare feet, I feel the wet Earth beneath my toes.

Withered orange and brown leaves nourish the dirt below.

I feel a restless rush in belief of nature anew.

And suddenly, yet again, I am ten,

Running with the rising sun on my brow and warm wind carrying the first morning dew, landing upon my eyelashes.

Through a hallow filled with pixie dust and ponds of ducklings, I remember a flowing gown and long and unkempt hair, holding a myriad of rose petals.

When spring arrives, I am reminded I can dance in my room with my window open and the promise of warmth that blossoms one's inner child.

The wind whispers secrets from years ago, a voice, a call I remember from a version of myself I cannot recall until the rebirth of spring.

When orange lilies swarmed by milkweed, sprouting under the tall oak I would climb in bare feet and a dirt lined Cinderella nightgown to seek the Robin's nest filled with blue eggs.

I cannot see her, a version of myself never to be again, yet she always calls our name once the sweetgrass grows again.

The awakening of spring brings new life and old memories.

Shall we go to the garden of tulips and magnolias' to be children again? Together?

The nostalgia spring brings is a recollection of curiosity and adventure, a reminder that all will breathe the sweet air once more,

And ever so slowly, as withered branches burst with green, I remember that I can exist again with childlike bewilderment and possibility.

I dance on sun warmed soil with a belly full of wild strawberries and sweet lemonade,

All this loveliness because the sun shines down and melts our cold snow and frigid bones to bring forth new life.